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ABSTRACT

This document contains an introductory paper and three case studies on improving teaching and learning at further education (FE) colleges in the United Kingdom. "Introduction" (Graham Peeke) reports on the following: government efforts to improve teaching at FE colleges; the work being done by the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) at the strategic, organizational, and individual levels to enhance the development of FE teachers; and FE colleges' self-assessment of teaching and learning, and implementation of improvement strategies in preparation for FEDA inspection. The first case study, "The Lead Teacher Initiative" (Richard Jerome), describes how Barnsley College's lead teacher initiative has contributed to the college's transformation by promoting and supplementing incremental improvements in the standards of teaching and learning in both higher and further education. "Continuing Professional Development through Peer Monitoring" (Fiona Kaplan) discusses how Coventry Technical College's peer monitoring program, which is based on an experiential learning and peer mentoring model, has contributed to FE lecturers' professional development. "The Teaching and Learning Process-Improvement Team" (Cathi Caley) describes a project in which Skelmersdale College formulated a process-improvement team that developed a system to identify and promote shared understanding of good practice in teaching and learning across the college. (MN)

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FEDA Further Education Development Agency

Improving teaching and learning

FEDA's contribution and examples of college good practice

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Edited by Graham Peeke

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The lead teacher initiative
Richard Jerome, Head of Higher Education and International Links, Barnsley College

Continuing professional development through peer monitoring
Fiona Kaplan, Coordinator of Teacher Training, Coventry Technical College

The teaching and learning process-improvement team
Cathi Caley, Manager of Staff and Curriculum Development, Skelmersdale College

1. Introduction

Graham Peeke

The learning age states that high standards must continue to be a priority for further education. The Government wishes to ensure better teaching and proposes a recognised initial teacher training qualification, a framework for continuing professional development and the establishment of an FE National Training Organisation (FENTO) as a means of achieving this. This latter aspiration was achieved with the establishment of FENTO in March 1999. Colleges are under pressure to improve retention, raise achievement and achieve good inspection grades. Student satisfaction is an important goal for all colleges and their teachers. All of this places the development of teachers centre stage in a strategy designed to drive up standards.

Despite this rhetoric, the development of FE teachers has not had a high priority in the recent past. There has been no compulsory requirement for teachers in FE to be teacher trained and no requirement to 'remain in good standing' through a system of continuing professional development (CPD). Many colleges have seen the proportion of budget spent on staff development decline since incorporation, and the major emphasis has been on student learning rather than teaching. The development of information and learning technology (ILT) has threatened to do away with teachers altogether, often overlooking their central role to inspire, motivate, provide guidance and assist in the development of learning communities – which is essential if learning with new technology effectively transcends organisational and geographical boundaries.

Recent developments are laying the foundation for a new FE teacher professionalism. One of FENTO's key strategic aims is the development of national standards for teaching and supporting learning and those developed for England and Wales were published in January 1999. National standards for teaching in further education already exist in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The standards will facilitate the creation of a framework for continuing professional development and coupled with a more systematic approach to the training of new entrants, will help create a more professional teaching workforce. The recent creation of professional bodies for teachers in schools (the General Teaching Council) and higher education (the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education) has drawn attention to the professional nature of teaching. No comparable body yet exists for teachers in further education but the current climate serves to promote reflection on the professionalism of FE staff.

What FEDA is doing

FEDA is operating at strategic, organisational and individual levels to enhance the development of FE teachers. At strategic level, FEDA provided the secretariat for the Further Education Staff Development Forum, the body that prepared the FENTO submission, and for FENTO itself. On behalf of the Forum, FEDA has carried out the teacher standards development project and has been a key partner in the development of FENTO. FEDA has also conducted a major benchmarking survey into staff development within the sector.

FEDA's *Spotlight on learning* programme supports colleges at both organisational and individual levels by identifying and disseminating good practice in specific subject areas. The programme has three stages. In the first stage, teachers and other specialists draw up a good practice framework for the subject. Each framework covers all the activities involving subject teachers and includes a column for the aspects of organisational and management support that enable good practice to take place. The second stage trawls English and Welsh colleges for examples of good practice in the subject area. The third stage disseminates the most interesting and innovative practice through one-day events and a publication. The programme has already produced frameworks and run dissemination events for 11 subjects in the FE curriculum. Five more subjects will be tackled this year – ESOL, Music, Childcare Studies, Agriculture and Maths.

FEDA also runs the *Effective teaching and learning* project which is designed to help colleges enable larger, more diverse groups of learners to achieve their qualification aims. The programme also helps colleges become more inclusive in practice. It focuses particularly on learning styles, learning skills, differentiation, course-congruent learning support, and individual target-setting and review.

More recently in May 1999, FEDA established a Centre for Professional Development with a focus on the professional development of managers, teachers and governors. The key purposes of the centre are to:

- deliver a range of flexible and high quality training to principals, senior and middle managers, governors, teachers and those supporting learning

- conduct research and development in the fields of management, leadership, governance and FE teaching
- provide consultancy support to colleges and other sector organisations such as FENTO.

What colleges are doing

FEDA's programme of work comprises a comprehensive range of activities to support and develop teachers. A range of innovative work is also going on in colleges. Much of it is linked to the self-assessment of teaching and learning in preparation for inspection. Colleges have developed a range of systems to improve teaching, including lead teacher initiatives, peer mentoring and the use of process improvement teams. This report includes three short case studies outlining initiatives in Barnsley College, Coventry Technical College and Skelmersdale College. They are not the only ways forward but they represent interesting work in progress that has had an impact in the colleges using them and can be readily adapted for use in other institutions.

If you would like to know more about FEDA's work on teacher development, or have examples of interesting approaches to the development of teachers in your own college you would like to share, please contact: Graham Peeke, FEDA Eastern Region Office, Merlin Place, Milton Rd, Cambridge CB4 0DP. Tel: 01223 420579 e-mail: gpeeke@feda.ac.uk

2. Case studies

The lead teacher initiative

Richard Jerome, Barnsley College

Since its introduction at the beginning of November 1997, the lead teacher initiative at Barnsley College has attracted considerable interest regionally, nationally and, increasingly, internationally. There is clear evidence that the initiative has significantly influenced curriculum delivery, lecturers' teaching styles and the quality of students' learning experiences.

The primary objective of the lead teacher initiative is to contribute to the transformation of the college by promoting and supplementing incremental improvements in the standards of teaching and learning in both higher education and further education. It is not a quick fix. It is a vehicle, or catalyst, to encourage lecturers to re-appraise approaches to effective teaching and re-evaluate strategies that maximise students' enjoyment of learning and their attainments.

The initiative does not stand alone. It is a central plank in a whole raft of innovatory policies and pilot programmes, which include flexible learning, STAFFIT (the college's IT staff development scheme) and Virtual College (an Internet system), all designed to accelerate the college's transition from a teaching institution to a learning organisation.

A lead teacher was appointed to each of the nine curriculum departments, with one for HE courses, and provision was made to recruit a specialist for learners with severe learning difficulties and disabilities. Criteria for appointment included peer-group endorsement and substantial evidence of successful teaching experience.

The progress of the initiative was overseen by a senior cross-college head of department, reporting directly to the chief executive. The lead teachers elected a coordinator to facilitate implementation and development of the project.

In the earliest stages, there were fears that heads of department would require lead teachers to report directly on the teaching of specified lecturers. An

immediate priority was therefore to allay these concerns by devising a code of practice and by phasing in the project gradually, sensitively and transparently. Particular emphasis was laid on lead teacher team development and team-building.

There was widespread consultation over the details of the code of practice. Classroom and laboratory observation was divided into a three-stage process. At pre-observation meetings the lead teacher agreed which class was to be observed and when; explained the observation report form, the observation-reporting criteria and the reporting procedures; and invited discussion about the group, teaching methods and any issues where reassurance could be given.

The second stage, the observation itself, was also governed by well-publicised guidelines and procedures designed to ensure a rigorously professional approach by the lead teacher and to minimise disruption to the class.

Considerable attention was paid also to the third stage – the feedback session. This too needed to take place at an agreed time and location to guarantee sufficient privacy and opportunity for full discussion of strengths and issues (the term 'weakness' was deliberately avoided). Lead teachers had to give a copy of the observation reports to each lecturer who also filled in a form evaluating the process and the conduct of the observation by the lead teacher. Each lead teacher retained one copy of the observation report. No-one else was allowed a copy.

Given that the essential element of the initiative was the supportive but evaluative function of the lead teacher it was vital also that, where need arose, the lead teacher would undertake coaching and mentoring roles for colleagues. This has been one of the most successful aspects of the initiative, particularly appreciated by newly qualified teachers, staff new to the college and agency lecturers.

Improved standards of teaching and learning have also depended on appropriate reporting arrangements. Heads of department received verbal, general reports on teaching and learning at agreed intervals. Written reports summarising strengths of provision and issues to be addressed, but not identifying members of staff, have been produced for the spring half-term and end of summer term periods.

Heads of department have responded in various ways. One chose to devote a training day to exploring accelerated learning techniques, while another submitted a bid to fund whole-department training in assessment methods. These measures illustrate how lead teachers are influencing curriculum managers to focus on a practical teaching and learning agenda.

The success of the initiative has depended largely on the credibility of the lead teachers, so training was given a high priority. In the initial period before Christmas 1997, emphasis was placed on devising appropriate observation report forms, giving constructive feedback and developing observation skills. Starting with senior academic staff, lead teachers visited classes in pairs to gain confidence in observation and assessment skills. After Christmas, training concentrated on refining observation skills led by college managers with experience as part-time FEFC inspectors. One indicator of the success to date of the initiative is the repetitiveness of staff-to-lead teacher observations and the reported frequency of discussions about teaching and learning taking place in staff rooms.

The lead teacher initiative is now embedded and commands widespread support. Its contribution to raising teaching and learning standards is not questioned and it enjoys both management and union support. Students too are relatively well-informed about it, as they usually receive briefing from lecturers before observation. Its value is confirmed by a continuous stream of interested visitors to the college, including FEFC inspectors and the local MP Eric Illsley.

Self-assessment necessitates observation of classes and effective self-assessment reports contain lesson grading profiles. The next stage of the Barnsley College initiative involves grading observations (using FEFC grading criteria) to provide this data.

Many staff, and some lead teachers, have misgivings about this. Preparation has been thorough, with extensive use of case studies and training videos. Heads of department and NATFHE officials have also attended this training. In the initial visits to lessons in the autumn term, lead teachers will be accompanied by staff with inspectoral experience in order to moderate and standardise gradings. While lead teachers will be required to assign a grade to each observed session, the grade will be divulged to the lecturer only if he or she requests it. Individual lecturer's grades will remain confidential, only collated grades for departments will be circulated. Observed HE sessions will not be graded.

Awarding grades will undoubtedly be the next major challenge for the lead teachers. However, the initiative is built on solid foundations and the lead teachers themselves have acquired such a degree of respect among their peers that there is every reason to believe that the project can only go from strength to strength.

Richard Jerome is Head of Higher Education and International Links at Barnsley College.

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Continuing professional development through peer monitoring

Fiona Kaplan, Coventry Technical College

The diversity of further education has always presented a challenge for its staff development officers. How can training initiatives effectively support the disparate needs of staff delivering such a vast range of programmes to such a wide variety of learners? Recent Government initiatives on widening participation, inclusive learning and information and learning technology (ILT) make new demands on staff and will require rapid response in terms of training and development, informed by the new national standards for FE lecturers. It is vital that FE colleges seize the opportunity for regeneration but equally vital that they rethink their CPD programmes to support staff into the future.

Whole-college training days are an increasingly popular strategy to meet staff development needs and specialist conferences continue to provide effective updates. Unfortunately, the ideas generated are too often lost through lack of processes to aid further development and dissemination across the college.

In October 1997 Coventry Technical College initiated a CPD project on how to provide a programme for staff that could respond to the diversity and pace of change in the sector. The programme was based on the reflective practitioner model which is flexible enough to respond to individual lecturers' needs and at the same time inculcate a sustainable staff development process. The model is equally appropriate to development of new teachers and experienced staff.

However, our experience had demonstrated that the success of this experiential learning model depends on acquiring a particular set of learning skills which must include self-awareness, accurate description, critical analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Without them, the reflective process founders. We introduced these skills by training staff in basic peer-monitoring techniques to support each other in the reflective process. This proved effective both in supporting the lecturers' development and in simultaneously developing useful mentoring skills across the college.

Peer mentoring has many advantages. It is an effective way to develop course teams. It can be used not only to develop teaching skills but other skills too. It is cost-effective and need not involve the logistical staffing problems of traditional classroom mentoring. It can provide sustainable structures and self-help networks across the college.

We found that peer mentoring has applications across the whole range of key competences for professional development identified by FENTO national standards. The process has the advantage of providing a natural reciprocal model for sharing skills rather than the traditional apprenticeship model. The experience of working on the CPD project itself demonstrated applications of peer mentoring to a range of generic skills that FE lecturers increasingly need. Each school in the college nominated a CPD coordinator to form a cross-college CPD group. We have all worked closely to share good practice in staff development and provide support for staff continuing professional development. Through this project we have broadened the concept of peer mentoring to include the development of generic skills such as organising meetings, team-building, project management, presentation and education research.

Using peer mentoring in conjunction with development projects like this can stimulate great motivation by creating space for staff to develop new ideas and experiment. In many organisations flatter structures mean that responsibility for continuing professional development has increasingly been devolved to the individual employee so self-managed learning projects seem likely to be the CPD mode of the future. Like their own students, lecturers need dynamic learning models, offering possibilities for formulating their own learning goals and learning strategies: a process of 'managed serendipity' as one researcher describes it.* With careful negotiation of the 'learning contract' the link is created between individual learning and the college's strategic objectives. Once acquired it is a process that aids continuing professional development for life.

Fiona Kaplan is Coordinator of Teacher Training at Coventry Technical College.

* Geale, J (1995) *Stimulating the demand for continuing professional development among young professionals in North-West England.* Dept of Continuing Education, Lancaster University.

The teaching and learning process-improvement team

Cathi Caley, Skelmersdale College

When the process-improvement team for *Teaching, learning and the student experience* formed in November 1997, it was one of eight such teams that were part of senior management's desire to create a culture of collective thinking.

Process-improvement teams undertake specific, problem-solving tasks and disperse when the tasks are complete. This is essentially a process re-design approach and, as such, requires all staff to be involved in order to be effective. Thus remits for the eight teams were publicised and membership invited from all sections of the college. The cross-section of staff involved in the *Teaching, learning and the student*

experience team had one aim: to bring about a college-wide regeneration of ideas and practice related to teaching and learning. For this they needed a system to identify and promote a shared understanding of good practice in teaching and learning across the college. They also needed to develop systems of observation and self-evaluation that would accurately evaluate teaching and learning; consistently improve teaching and learning and lead to consensus on key issues of the teaching and learning self-assessment report.

The process of team learning began with public reflection, by considering how lesson observations had progressed during the college's preparation for inspection in early 1997. The team were then able to reach a shared understanding of their remit and to begin joint planning, using the transformation process model that had previously been introduced to all academic staff as part of their training for business regeneration and transformation.

Key performance indicators were identified, e.g. percentage of classes with inspection grades at 1, 2 and 3 and an increased range of teaching and learning strategies. The process was then followed. It started with identification of inputs, e.g. FEFC inspection report, current range of teaching and learning strategies, student retention and achievement. The next stage was through process standards; process procedures; process resources and staff know-how to the process output section. Here the group included regularly revised work schemes, lesson plans showing increased range of teaching and learning styles, focus on teaching and learning in staff review and trained observation teams.

The main outcome was a new system of teaching and learning observations. This system involved choosing a team and observers for a subject area. The team comprises a mentor for the development team, the relevant curriculum manager and senior tutor and a main grade lecturer from a different subject area, in order to promote cross-fertilisation of ideas between subject areas.

First the observation teams take part in a standardising training session and then they conduct lesson observations in pairs, each member working with each other member of the team at some point. The pairs not only observe lessons together, they also talk to a sample of the students concerned, complete observation documentation and meet the observed lecturer for a feedback session. Finally, once each member of a subject team has been observed, the observation teams reconvene to reflect on the strengths and issues for improvement discovered during the observations. In this way each observation team member gets to work with each other member, and in the standardisation feedback session, the whole team works together on its own and as part of a larger group of subject observation teams.

This process was first piloted with a group of 20 staff. The process itself was then reviewed and refined and another group of 12 staff has subsequently been trained. It is intended to continue the process until the self-critical culture which the college has been developing during the last five years has been extended to all members of teaching staff.

The benefits of the exercise noted so far include:

- the opportunity for dialogue with colleagues, to tease out a shared understanding of good teaching and learning
- the reflection that takes place in relation to one's own teaching as a result of observing the lessons of colleagues
- the opportunity to have feedback on one's performance in the classroom.

The standardisation and observation processes have demonstrated their effectiveness as a vehicle for continuous improvement; embedding the process will ensure that the same opportunity is extended to the widest possible group of staff. Establishing shared understanding of quality teaching and learning is the basis from which we will continuously improve.

The other essential component of any quality procedure is the regular review of the procedure itself. This opportunity is also built into our process via the feedback sessions for subject observation teams.

To emphasise the importance of a continuing dialogue, the staff review process has been revised to include the reports from lesson observations and the subsequent discussion which their inclusion will ensure.

One other outcome is the peer review, in which a member of staff will observe another member of staff's teaching and discuss what has been learned from this observation. The idea is relatively undeveloped but will be put into place in the next academic year.

The process-improvement team has fulfilled its remit and no longer meets as a team. However, what has been started should make continuous improvement of teaching and learning through lesson observation an accepted and effective process.

Cathi Caley is Manager of Staff and Curriculum Development at Skelmersdale College.

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Recent events are laying the foundation for a new FE teacher professionalism. FENTO has developed national standards for teaching and learning support. FEDA's Spotlight on learning programme supports colleges and teaching staff by identifying and disseminating good practice on specific subjects. The *Effective teaching and learning* programme helps colleges become more inclusive in practice. This short report examines the range of FEDA's teaching and learning work. It includes three case studies:

- **Continuing professional development through peer mentoring (Coventry Technical College)**
- **The lead teacher initiative (Barnsley College)**
- **The teaching and learning improvement process team (Skelmersdale College).**

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